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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the World Veterans Federation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The World Veterans Federation (WVF) is an international non-governmental organization which brings together those who have experienced the sufferings of war, as combatants – either side by side or as adversaries- and as civilian victims of war. A major objective of the Federation is to contribute to the establishment of a more peaceful, just and free world based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the International Bill of Human Rights. Throughout its history (WVF was founded in 1950), the organization has been a strong voice for peace and the resolution of conflicts.

At its 22nd General Assembly in Seoul in 1997, WVF recommended that *"with the support of member associations a comprehensive platform of activities in the field of conflict prevention be established, to form an integral part of a common programme designed to eliminate the causes of intolerance between peoples and ethnic groups, prejudice, discrimination and the divisions which lead to international conflicts and to civil and international wars"* In support of world peace, the WVF at its 23 General Assembly in Paris in 2000, noted *"with concern the alarming escalation of armed conflicts in the four corners of the world"* and called upon *"the international community to find a peaceful and political solution to the different conflicts around the world. . .(and) requests the WVF member associations to appeal to their respective governments inciting them to reduce arms sales, especially to poor countries "*.

The World Veterans Federation applauds the Commission on the Status of Women for focusing on ***"Eradicating Poverty, including empowerment of women in a global world"*** during its 46th Session in March 2002. While there are different interpretations of the root causes of poverty: from unfettered globalization to unequal status in society, to a skewed distribution of resources, to cultural practices, to discriminatory inheritance laws, to inadequate education and training, to incompetent or/and corrupt national structures, women suffer poverty disproportionately. If there is a war, it increases the possibility that they will live in poverty.

Not only can women caught in armed conflicts, through no fault of their own, lose their homes and communities, but also lose their husbands who provide for the basic necessities of life for themselves and their children. They can become stateless, without legal status or papers, and without the protection of a government or other legal entity. . They quickly can become an extremely fragile population: prime targets for sexual abuse, enforced prostitution, trafficking, and economic exploitation. They are refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons; they suffer disabilities from mines and other weaponry and experience emotional traumas. They are among the most vulnerable populations – part of the detritus of war. If there were no more wars, they would be part of history. Unhappily they are part of current events.

It is crucial that the consequences of wars be a major concern for the international community. As an organization of former combatants and civilian victims of

war, the WVF has dedicated itself to improve the situation and well being of those who having been impacted by war return to a life changed forever in a post-war environment. Those who have endured physical and mental disabilities, displacement from their homes, the breakup of family, and the loss of financial and social support are in need of assistance . We urge the UN CSW to mitigate the consequences of war for women by exploring and developing strategies to strengthen their economic and social position.

The World Veterans Federation concerned about the gaps and omissions of such assistance in many countries , promulgated a set of "**Guidelines to Basic Rights for War Veterans and Victims of War**"" which was submitted to the United Nations Commission on Social Development in 1998. In a Declaration accompanying the Guidelines, the WVF reaffirmed its commitment "**to ease the suffering and enhance the quality of life of victims of war and in general of all persons with disabilities, whether they are physical, sensorial or cognitive.**" Acknowledging that in today's conflict areas, which are derived from internal disputes, ninety percent of the casualties are civilians, mostly women and children, the Federation suggested vigorous responses were needed from governments and international agencies to meet the needs of the victims. A series of Legislation Conferences sponsored by the WVF brought governments to the table to share information and study proposals outlined in the WVF Guidelines.

There is perhaps no more brutal picture of the consequences of war for women, including a lifetime of poverty, than the story of the "comfort women" of World War II. These were the hundreds of thousands of Asian women and girls (Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and others) who were captured by the imperial Japanese army in its conquering march across Asia and forced into sexual servitude for the soldiers till the end of the war in 1945. For those who survived the slavery, and there were many who died along the way or committed suicide, the shame of their servitude precluded returning to their homelands and resuming their lives as they expected. Most of them had serious mental and physical health problems which dogged them all their subsequent lives.

Perhaps even more devastating was the shame that went with their sexual servitude which their culture attributed to their experiences, involuntary though they were. Instead of receiving support from family and community upon their release from captivity , the "comfort women" were ostracized and isolated . Many who anticipated such rejection never returned to their homes, but instead , unskilled and unprepared, with no prospects of marriage or any kind of family life, sank into anonymity by taking the lowest paying jobs available to them. Poverty- stricken, isolated from any kind of social support system, the surviving "comfort women" led unfulfilled and embittered lives. Only in recent years, beginning in the last decade did the tragic story of the "comfort women" see the light of day. The United Nations initiated its own investigation appointing a Special Rapporteur to look into the allegations, who affirmed the previous findings of those that the comfort women had been severely abused and exploited, and were indeed "**military sexual slaves**". The WVF espoused their cause early on, and has joined in efforts to obtain an apology and reparations. A recent resolution stated:

"WVF cdondemns all violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict; ...Expresses the hope that in the near future all the countries in the world will have to participate and seek proper and effective responses through the UN and specialized agencies and the international NGOs concerned to eliminate the violation of the rights of women in war time, emphasizing the need for appropriate systems and special compensation for the victims,..."

At its 23rd General Assembly held in Paris in 2000, the WVF addressed the issue of victims of violence during war in a resolution as follows.

"Noting that victims of violence, especially women, suffer from its consequences to a large extent and from discrimination also after the conflicts have ended in the individual states;

"Recalling that public opinion does not pay the necessary attention to the needs of these women for an appropriate assistance;

"Considers it important that further assistance should be provided and offered to these groups of persons, implying material and psycho-social help and comprehensive health care."

Whereas governments often will consider some health care benefits and other post-war assistance for former combatants, women victims of war are likely to be overlooked. War widows are one such group. For centuries, war widows were abandoned or abused. In today's world, they are likely to be sunk in poverty and isolated without state or private support. A current example are the widows of Afghanistan who under the Taliban had no means for survival and were not permitted to work – their plight (for those who survived) is pitiful. We urge the CSW, as it focuses on the eradication of poverty and the empowerment of women will take up their cause. In a resolution entitled "PENSIONS FOR WIDOWS AND OTHER ELIGIBLE PERSONS, WVF called for remedial action on behalf of war widows .

"Considering that pensions and allowances granted to widows and dependents of war veterans and war disabled are insufficient and do not enable them to meet their needs; Noting the price increase in medicine and health care; Noting that some national legislations still include economic differences, giving rise to inequalities and discrimination that are obviously unfair;

"Urges, as a consequence, those governments concerned to introduce legislative measures that would guarantee pensions and allowances and harmonize legal provisions in order to avoid inequalities...."

Another large female population in desperate economic, social and psychological circumstances as a result of wars are the 50 million refugees and internally displaced , the great majority of whom are women. While the international community seeks to provide basic survival assistance in the way of shelter, food and water, protection is minimal for the refugees, allowing them to be subject to all kinds of exploitation and sexual abuse violating their human rights. WVF has long called attention to their impoverished and threatened status and urged that skills training and education be included as part of the

basic spectrum of assistance provided by international agencies, so that they can take care of themselves and their children when they are repatriated. Another WVF resolution (2000) calls for "ASSISTANCE FOR RETURNING REFUGEES:

"Noting that many States have accepted refugees from States in conflict who now want to return into their native countries;

"Recalling that the necessary protection and security must absolutely be reestablished; i.e., by mine clearance;

"Considers it important that the returning refugees receive the necessary protection as well as the help they need in order to be able to build up their lives in the destroyed areas;

"Requests that the donor States coordinate their assistance in such a way that people with disabilities be given special attention and access to the services they require upon their repatriation."

The World Veterans Federation has been an advocate of the creation of an International Criminal Court for many years. As the ratification process of the Statute written during the Rome Conference in 1998 nears completion, it is clear that it will enter into force in the near future. This is an important step to put teeth into international law, and one that is beneficial for women by protecting their human rights. In its resolution passed in Paris in 2000, the WVF stated :

"Observing that during multiple internal and international conflicts an ever increasing number of grave offences against International Humanitarian law are perpetrated throughout the world, in total violation of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 to which certain States responsible for these crimes are parties and that therefore it is urgent that the International Criminal Court put an end to the impunity of those responsible for the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression,

"Urges the member associations to be strong advocates for gender justice so that gender-based crimes against women will be prosecuted with the same dedication as other crimes and no exemptions would be allowed for religious or cultural reasons..."

By ending impunity for criminals who commit gender-based crimes of any kind, the Statute for the International Criminal Court promises to be a powerful deterrent to the exploitation of women in war, since such crimes will be fully prosecuted. The existence of the Court will enhance women's human rights by shielding them from rape, sexual violence and other abuse. As a result, it is likely to protect women from the kind of economic exploitation that vulnerable women have suffered in the past. . Hopefully, the trauma and poverty that the "comfort women" of World War II experienced will never occur again.

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